

Nothin' But Love for the SC GOP

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 10, 2009 NCR Today

You gotta love those South Carolina Republicans. First, Governor Mark Sanford took the most famous hike in the history of the Appalachians, which in his mind included Buenos Aires. Now, Congressman Joe Wilson is being roundly ridiculed for shouting out "You lie!" in the middle of President Barack Obama's speech to a joint session of Congress last night.

I wish to come to Mr. Wilson's defense.

First, America's legislature suffers from the fact that, unlike its parliamentary counterparts, there is no debate. America's congressmen deliver set speeches, probably written by someone else, and then leave the chamber. By contrast, anyone who has watched "Prime Minister's Questions" on C-SPAN knows that in the House of Commons, you are expected to be able to defend an intellectual proposition when it is criticized, and that sometimes the criticism is withering. I have long fantasized that a U.S. President would submit himself to such an interrogation, but I suppose the atmospherics of the current arrangement play to a President's strengths so any change is unlikely.

Second, and unintentionally, any focus on the Republican Party's criticisms of the President's plan have been lost amidst all the focus on Mr. Wilson's faux pas. Indeed, in a speech in which the always calm President called for comity and working together, the image of an angry Mr. Wilson yelling and a bored Congressman Eric Kantor reading his blackberry while the President spoke, made the GOP look like the ones who are being silly and obstructionist. They looked small and childish while the President looked cool and collected.

So, hats off to Mr. Wilson. I have half a mind to call him and see if he wants to go hiking this weekend.

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